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ABSTRACT

The Office of United States Senator Daniel Inouye requested information on state minimum licensing and certification requirements for physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and nurses who work directly with patients in state mental hospitals. To obtain this information, the General Accounting Office called the offices of the directors/commissioners of the 50 state mental health programs to inquire about state licensing and certification of these professionals. Eleven states did not provide information (Arizona, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Wisconsin). The results revealed that the minimum licensing and certification requirements provided for physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and nurses varied among the 39 responding states. The responses showed that: (1) all of the 39 states required physicians and nurses to be licensed; (2) 37 of the 39 states required that psychologists be licensed or certified; (3) 15 of the 39 states required that psychiatrists be licensed and board-eligible or board-certified; and (4) 13 of the 39 states required that social workers be licensed, certified, or registered. Thirty-two of the 37 states that responded to an additional question said that physicians working in state mental hospitals but who are not board-eligible or board-certified as psychiatrists are permitted to provide psychiatric services. (NB)

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United States General Accounting Office

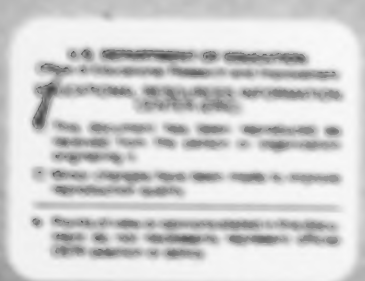
GAO

Fact Sheet for the Honorable
Daniel K. Inouye,
United States Senate

January 1987

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Licensing and Certification Requirements for Staff in State Hospitals



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GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Human Resources Division

B-225274

January 29, 1987

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
United States Senate

Dear Senator Inouye:

This fact sheet is in response to your request and agreements with your office to obtain information from the states on the minimum licensing and certification requirements for physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and nurses who work directly with patients in state mental hospitals.

We worked with the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors to develop a survey document to send to the states to obtain their minimum licensing and certification requirements for each of the above kinds of professionals. Using this document, we received a limited number of responses from the states, and those that were provided required extensive clarification before the data could be summarized. Because of the additional work that would be needed to improve the response rate and to clarify the responses provided, we chose another approach for collecting the requested data. With the assistance of our chief medical advisor and principal psychologist, we developed a data form for collecting the needed information through a telephone survey.

During the period July to October 1986, we called the offices of the directors and commissioners of 50 state mental health programs to find out if each kind of professional providing direct patient care in state mental hospitals was required to be licensed and/or certified in that state. Thirty-nine of the 50 states provided us with responses. The remaining 11 states did not provide information. We did not verify the accuracy of the data provided, but responses to the survey were reviewed by our chief medical advisor.

In summary, we found that the minimum licensing and certification requirements provided for physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and nurses varied among the 39 responding states. The responses showed that

-- 39 (100 percent) of the responding states require physicians and nurses to be licensed (see p. 4);

-- 27 (69 percent) of the responding states require that psychologists be licensed or certified (see p. 4);

-- 15 (38 percent) of the responding states require that psychiatrists, in addition to being licensed, must be board eligible or board certified (see p. 5); and

-- 13 (33 percent) of the responding states require that social workers be licensed, certified, or registered (see p. 6).

In addition, we asked the states if physicians (classified and employed as such in state mental hospitals) who are not board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrists are permitted to provide psychiatric services. Thirty-two of the 37 states that provided us information said that physicians were permitted to provide these services (see p. 7). According to our chief medical advisor, this situation is not uncommon when there are shortages of board-eligible and board-certified psychiatrists.

As arranged with your office, unless its contents are announced earlier, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 30 days from the issue date. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others on request.

Should you need additional information on the contents of this document, please call me at 275-5451.

Sincerely yours,

Franklin A. Curtis

Franklin A. Curtis
Associate Director

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LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR STAFF IN STATE HOSPITALS

LICENSING REQUIREMENTS FOR PHYSICIANS AND NURSES

All 39 states responding to our survey stated that physicians and nurses who provide direct patient care in state mental hospitals are required to be licensed in that state.[1] According to our chief medical advisor, to obtain a license, a physician or nurse must pass a state examination or receive an exemption from taking an examination. For example, a common exemption is a state's accepting an applicant who has a license from another state (having already passed that state's examination). The following states responded that both physicians and nurses were required to be licensed to work in state mental hospitals:

Alabama[2]	Kentucky	Oregon
Alaska	Louisiana	Pennsylvania
Arkansas	Michigan	Rhode Island
California	Mississippi	South Carolina
Colorado	Missouri	South Dakota
Connecticut	Nevada	Tennessee
Delaware	New Hampshire	Texas
Florida	New Jersey	Utah
Georgia	New York	Vermont
Hawaii	North Carolina	Virginia
Idaho	North Dakota	Washington
Indiana	Ohio	West Virginia
Iowa	Oklahoma	Wyoming

LICENSURE OR CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

As shown in the list that follows, 27 (69 percent) of the 39 states responded that the psychologists who work directly with

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[1]The following 11 states, although contacted, did not participate in our survey: Arizona, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Wisconsin.

[2]Under Alabama law, state mental institutions are exempt, but according to a Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation policy, physicians must be licensed.

patients in state mental hospitals are required to be licensed or certified.[3]

Alabama[4]	Florida	New Jersey	South Carolina
Alaska[5]	Georgia[6]	North Carolina	South Dakota
Arkansas	Indiana	North Dakota	Tennessee
California[7]	Kentucky	Ohio	Utah
Colorado	Michigan	Oklahoma	Vermont[8]
Connecticut	Mississippi	Oregon	Wyoming
Delaware	Nevada	Pennsylvania	

The following states require no licensure or certification:

Hawaii	Louisiana[9]	New York	Virginia
Idaho	Missouri	Rhode Island	Washington
Iowa	New Hampshire	Texas	West Virginia

BOARD ELIGIBILITY OR CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR PSYCHIATRISTS

According to the responses provided by the 39 states, 15 (38 percent) required that psychiatrists providing direct patient care in state mental hospitals, in addition to being licensed,

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[3]According to our chief medical advisor, certification is the process by which a professional's credentials are reviewed by a peer group within the same profession, and the professional is determined to be appropriately qualified in that specialty.

[4]Under Alabama state law, state mental institutions are exempt, but, according to a Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation policy, psychologists must be licensed.

[5]All Ph.D.s must be licensed or obtain a license within 1 year. All those with a Master of Science or a Master of Arts degree must work under the direct supervision of a Ph.D. and obtain a license within 3 years.

[6]Licensure is required at the Ph.D. level only.

[7]Unlicensed psychologists are permitted to work under a licensed psychologist for 2 years until a license is obtained.

[8]According to a Vermont official, there is no licensure or certification requirement, but standard practice is that a psychologist will not be hired unless licensed.

[9]Must work under a licensed psychologist.

must be board-eligible or board-certified.[10] The responses provided showed that 13 (33 percent) of the states required psychiatrists to be board eligible or board certified; 2 (5 percent) required psychiatrists to be board certified. The following states require board eligiblity or board certification:

Alabama	Kentucky	Ohio	South Carolina
Alaska	Mississippi	Oregon	South Dakota
Colorado	Missouri	Rhode Island	Vermont
			Washington

Nevada and New York both require board certification. The following have no requirements for board eligiblity or board certification:

Arkansas	Hawaii	New Hampshire	Tenessee
California	Idaho	New Jersey	Texas
Connecticut	Indiana	North Carolina	Utah
Delaware	Iowa	North Dakota	Virginia
Florida	Louisiana	Oklahoma	West Virginia
Georgia	Michigan	Pennsylvania	Wyoming

LICENSING, CERTIFICATION, AND REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Of the 39 states, 13 (33 percent) responded that social workers providing direct patient care in state mental hospitals are required to be licensed, certified, or registered. Ten of the states require licensure:

Alabama[11]	North Dakota
Arkansas	Oklahoma
California	South Dakota
Idaho	Utah
New Jersey	Virginia

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[10]Individuals who are board eligible have met criteria established by the specialty board for psychiatry, such as type, length, and location of training, but have not sat and passed the examination set by the board. To be board certified, an individual must have met the criteria established by the specialty board, and have sat and passed an examination set by that board.

[11]Under Alabama law, state mental institutions are exempt, but according to a Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation policy, social workers must be licensed.

Two require certification: Connecticut and Nevada. One state requires registration: Oregon.[12] The remaining 26 states responded that social workers in state mental hospitals are not required to be licensed, certified, or registered:

Alaska	Iowa	New York	Tennessee
Colorado	Kentucky	North Carolina	Vermont
Delaware	Louisiana[13]	Ohio	Washington
Florida	Michigan	Pennsylvania	West Virginia
Georgia	Mississippi	Rhode Island	Wyoming
Hawaii	Missouri	South Carolina	
Indiana	New Hampshire	Texas	

PHYSICIANS WHO ARE NOT BOARD-ELIGIBLE OR BOARD-CERTIFIED PSYCHIATRISTS ARE PERMITTED TO PROVIDE PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

We asked the states if physicians (classified and employed as such in state mental hospitals) who are not board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrists are permitted to provide psychiatric care, do psychiatric work-ups,[14] or prescribe psychotropic drugs.

In 32 of the 37 responding states (New York and Virginia did not provide this information), physicians are permitted to perform these types of psychiatric services in state mental hospitals. This situation is not uncommon, according to our chief medical advisor, when there are shortages of board-eligible and board-certified psychiatrists. The remaining 5 states responded that only board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrists are permitted to provide these psychiatric services in state mental hospitals. According to the responses provided, the following are states in which physicians who are not board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrists are permitted to provide psychiatric services in state mental hospitals:

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[12]According to an Oregon official, a registered social worker must meet an experience requirement and pass a state test.

[13]Must provide services under a licensed social worker.

[14]According to our chief medical advisor, a psychiatric work-up consists of a medical history and evaluation of a patient's prior history and exposure to, and experience with, mental problems or episodes that could have an impact on the psyche.

Arkansas	Indiana	New Jersey	South Dakota
California	Iowa	North Carolina[15]	Tennessee[16]
Colorado	Kentucky[17]	North Dakota	Texas
Connecticut	Louisiana[18]	Ohio[19]	Utah
Delaware	Michigan	Oklahoma[17]	Vermont
Florida	Mississippi	Oregon	Washington[20]
Georgia	Missouri	Pennsylvania[21]	West Virginia
Idaho	New Hampshire	Rhode Island[17]	Wyoming

The following are states where only board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrists are permitted to provide psychiatric services in state mental institutions: Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, and South Carolina.

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[15]Must have completed psychiatric residency.

[16]A Tennessee official stated that a physician must be a "licensed" psychiatrist.

[17]Only under the supervision of a psychiatrist.

[18]Under the supervision of a board-eligible or board-certified psychiatrist.

[19]The psychiatric services provided must be reviewed by an attending psychiatrist, according to an Ohio official.

[20]In certain instances, only under the supervision of a psychiatrist.

[21]Must have completed psychiatric residency.

(118167)

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